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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000733

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/IR AND SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/10/2019

TAGS: [IR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: IRAN ELECTION UPDATE: TRUCKERS INDICATE SUPPORT  
FOR MOUSAVI IS ON THE RISE

REF: ASHGABAT 687

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Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Conversations with Iranian truck drivers held in and around Ashgabat on June 10 demonstrate that support for candidate Mir Hussein Mousavi is growing among working class Iranians. Iran Watcher spoke with transiting drivers representing various geographic areas and ethnic groups and found that a majority of those interviewed plan to vote for Mousavi. Most of the others said they are still firmly behind Ahmadinejad, while still others declined to state a preference, saying the vote could go "either way." These views contrast sharply with those expressed in earlier conversations with drivers at the border with Uzbekistan on May 29 (Reftel), several days before both the televised Ahmadinejad-Mousavi debate and President Obama's speech in Cairo, which was, according to our interlocutors, very well received by Iranians.

¶2. (C) Four Mashhad drivers parked at the Gaudan customs area south of Ashgabat who had just delivered several truckloads of refrigerators spoke enthusiastically about the upcoming election, and said they all planned to vote on Friday at the Iranian Embassy in Ashgabat. Ali, one of the four, identified himself as a Karroubi supporter and said that he supports him because he finds him the most "believable" of the candidates. This statement provoked a retort and brief argument with another driver in the group Abolfaz, who said he backs Mousavi and expects him to win against Ahmadinejad in a second round of voting on June 19. A third, Mahmoud, said that he also supports Mousavi, as do "most young people and university students in Iran." When asked why, he said that "he Iranian people want relations with the U.S., and believe that Mousavi can best deliver on that aspiration." He proceeded to playfully slap a fourth driver, Reza, on the shoulder, saying, "Only this idiot still supports Ahmadinejad." In defense, Reza pointed out that Ahmadinejad had "reached out and formed good relations with many countries in the world," and is the "best candidate for Iran." Mahmoud and Abolfaz, invoking the Persian proverb (akin to "charity begins at home), "A lamp from home should

not be taken to the mosque," said "Ahmadinejad is sending our money abroad to Hamas and Hizbollah, instead of using it to help Iranians who need it."

¶3. (C) An elderly Tehran driver named Abbas, also at Gaudan, said he had not been following the candidates closely, but planned to vote for Mousavi, who he said was a neighbor and lifelong friend. "We played together as children," he said. "He is a good man, and I will vote for him in Tehran on Friday."

¶4. (C) Ibrahim, a driver from the town of Kuchan (located between Mashhad and the Turkmenistan border) said he plans to vote for Ahmadinejad, "because he represents the underclass." He explained that past Presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani, advanced the interests of, and were supported by the "bourgeoisie," whereas Ahmadinejad, whom he called a "skilled politician," had done much to help the poor and disadvantaged. He also lauded him for bringing back the "Islamic" in "Islamic Republic," whereas Rafsanjani, when he was elected, had emphasized the "Republic" at the expense of religious values of great importance to the people.

¶5. (C) Three ethnic Turkmen drivers from Golestan we found resting in the shade of a tree in the industrial area of Bedeu said that support for Mousavi is strong among Turkmen, and that "everyone in Azerbaijan" supports him. Farshid, the more talkative of the three, said he would vote for Mousavi, because he supports the reformist platform. His companion, Shamseddin, said that as a Turkmen, the election "matters little" to him and that he did not plan to vote. All three complained that their children have no opportunity to study Turkmen, their mother tongue, in school, only "Persian, Arabic and English." "Don't some children in America go to Spanish-speaking schools?" they queried.

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¶6. (C) At another location in Bedeu, a group of eight drivers from Azerbaijan province confirmed that support is strong for Mousavi among ethnic Azeris. They hoped to be home in time to vote on Friday, otherwise planned to vote at the Iranian Embassy. Like everyone else we spoke with, they asked, "Which candidate does America want to see elected?"

¶7. (C) COMMENT: This sampling of views showed both support for Mousavi and a belief that he can and will be elected. It appears that Mousavi has begun to cut into Ahmadinejad's traditional working class base of followers. END COMMENT.  
MILES